

2000 Session of the Indiana General Assembly

Legislature allocates tobacco settlement funds

Settlement will help rural Indiana, farmers

The national tobacco settlement legislation approved this session provides a framework to help rural Indiana and farmers who grow the product. With the strong support of Governor Frank O'Bannon, we appropriated \$8.5 million in the House to help in these two areas, but I was very disappointed the Senate Chairman deleted this funding. While I was disappointed at the action of the Senate Chairman, I will dedicate all of my resources in the next session to make sure money is appropriated for this cause. However, the final bill did create a fund that eventually will dedicate assistance to areas of the state that will suffer economically through the loss of tobacco production.



Rep. Lytle discusses tobacco legislation with Rep. Jim Bottorff.

The Rural Community Impact Fund will help develop new agricultural enterprises in those cities and towns, including facilities for research and development, new market opportunities, educational and leadership development programs and direct financial assistance. The Tobacco Farmers Impact Fund will help producers make a successful transition to alternative, economically viable commodities and support efforts to preserve and maintain Indiana family farms and farmland.

Senior citizens will also see benefits

Senior citizens on lower incomes should not have to choose between buying food to eat or the prescription drugs they need to remain healthy. Thanks to the legislation allocating money from the national tobacco settlement, they won't have to make that decision.

The final bill includes \$20 million to help low income seniors purchase prescription drugs. From my visits around the district, this is one of the most pressing concerns among older Hoosiers. Some people even have been forced to drive as far as Canada to get these drugs at a more affordable rate.

Bi-partisan agreement to help several programs and groups

Certainly one of the biggest achievements of the 2000 legislative session was passage of legislation that sets up a system to allocate the more than \$4 billion Indiana will be receiving from the national tobacco settlement over the next 25 years. The funds will be used for health care services, tobacco prevention programs and assistance for senior citizens on lower incomes who have trouble purchasing prescription drugs.

The final bill was the result of many months of work by legislators on both sides of the aisle. From the start, we have attempted to assure that most of the funding goes to health care and efforts to reduce the use of tobacco products.

In the first year alone, \$35 million will be dedicated toward health care programs, with an emphasis on tobacco education and prevention. Another \$20 million will be used to help seniors on low incomes purchase needed prescription drugs. Community health centers will receive \$15 million in program support, along with a one-time-only appropriation of \$10 million to make physical improvements to facilities.

This is a considerable accomplishment for a short session of the Legislature, and it is a tribute to the willingness of officials to set aside partisan differences in order to pass bills that will have long-term benefits for the people of our state.

Cemetery reforms continue

In 1999, the Indiana General Assembly began the process of reforming the state's cemetery laws to provide a more accurate idea of where these burial grounds are located so they could be adequately preserved. Those efforts resumed during the 2000 legislative session with passage of a proposal that will help identify and protect cemeteries on public and private land.

Under provisions of the new law, the Indiana Department of Natural Resources (DNR) will supervise an effort to survey and record all cemeteries and burial grounds in the state.

The law also creates a 100-foot buffer zone around a recorded cemetery. Any person wishing to disturb property within this zone will be required to submit a development plan for DNR approval. Exceptions to this rule will cover people who have homes that abut cemeteries.

Finally, any person who sells land that contains a cemetery must disclose its location on a property deed.

New law will establish IHSAA review panel

The General Assembly addressed parent concerns about the Indiana High School Athletic Association through legislation that creates a panel to review appeals of rulings made by the IHSAA.

The panel will consist of parents, high school principals and athletic directors. Issues that they will rule on include the eligibility of student athletes.

Helping working men and women

New legislation addresses disability, unemployment

Legislators have approved measures that will make substantial changes in coverage for workers who are injured on the job and improve benefits for those people who have lost their jobs.

Around 90 percent of Indiana workers who receive a disabling injury in a workplace accident will see their compensation increase close to 50 percent. There are improvements in the one-time cash payments made to a person who suffers a permanent partial impairment in a workplace accident. The change will help any worker determined to have up to the 30th degree of impairment, which includes around 90 percent of all injured employees. Weekly disability payments also will increase.

Indiana workers who lose their jobs will see unemployment compensation increase by 33 percent over the next three years. The maximum



Rep. Lytle with Speaker John R. Gregg.

benefit will increase from \$252 to \$336 by July 2002. To finance the increase, the state will use a larger share of the unemployment trust fund, a move that will cut premium payments by employers by nearly \$80 million the next two years.

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Session Briefs

Medicaid -- Currently, Indiana requires that a person suffer from a life-long disability in order to receive Medicaid Disability assistance. The General Assembly approved legislation that would replace the life-long requirement with a four-year disability requirement.

Indiana has the most restrictive Medicaid Disability definition in the nation. Forty-eight other states require that a person suffer from a disability for one year. New Hampshire is the only other state which requires a four- year disability.

With so many advances in health care, there is a treatment for almost every type of ailment. Medicaid was designed to help needy individuals, but the current system excludes so many from qualifying for the aid that most other states would offer them.

This is not an attempt to provide free health care to all Hoosiers. It simply modifies the restrictions just enough so that a few more deserving individuals are able to qualify.

Ten Commandments -- Legislators from both sides of the aisle helped pass a new law that would give state and local governments the right to display the Ten Commandments on public property.

Many legislators feel that this legislation reflects the sentiments of a majority of the people of Indiana that our country was founded on the principles contained in the Ten Commandments. Legislators expressed their views that the Ten Commandments are as important as any laws in helping define what makes this country so great.

The final decision on putting up a historic display containing the Commandments would be left up to local officials, who also would decide what version of the Commandments to display.

E-mail updates available on state legislative issues

Several people have indicated to me that they would like to receive e-mail updates on legislative issues and other issues important to our district. I am pleased to offer this service through my legislative office.

Simply e-mail or call my office and I will add you to this list. I am excited about the technological advances over the past few years that allow you nearly instant access to legislative news and information.

Lytle heads up initiative to have study committee look into sewer and water problems

This past session many of my efforts were focused on my proposal to provide more public accountability in the operation of regional water and sewer districts

I first became aware of the problems people were having with the administration of these sewer and water districts in a situation that cropped up around Country Squire Lakes in Jennings County. An area group had purchased an existing private utility and they wanted to improve sewer services in any area. As it turned out, they also were expanding services into areas where it wasn't requested. The fallout from that dispute led me to pursue several of the changes included in House Bill 1248.

From the way that this situation in Jennings County has gone, it has become obvious to me that a number of people resent being forced to do something without having a voice in the matter. If for no other reason, we need to study this issue to make sure that these groups are accountable to the public, will communicate with local residents, and will work with potential new customers. There needs to be opportunity to decide if the project is needed and if it is wanted.

My initial goal was to pursue comprehensive reforms in the administration of regional water, sewer and solid waste districts. After the bill was heard in committee, many people felt this issue was too large to be handled in a short legislative session, so it was decided to place more emphasis on beefing up public notice requirements, and having the issue considered by a legislative study committee.

The legislation requires water and sewer districts to notify any property owner by mail and have more noticeable newspaper ads about any improvement project under consideration that would have an impact on that person's land.



Rep. Lytle with Gov. Frank O'Bannon.